

The Wrong Path: Adultery

Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27 Sermon

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Proverbs has presented us all with a choice between two different paths. Path #1 is the way of the foolish and Path #2 is the way of the wise. Over and over again through the first four chapters the father-figure has told his son to choose the way of the wise. But today the father invites his son and us to imagine what it would be like to try the way of the foolish.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to give yourself over to living for yourself? Just saying, “I’m going to stop trying to live God’s way and I’m gonna live my way. I’m gonna do what I want to do when I want to do it.” Sounds intriguing, right? I think if we’re honest with ourselves most of us have imagined what that would be like and how good it might feel.

Today the father takes one temptation many men and women face and follows that temptation to its final conclusion. He takes the temptation of adultery. *Adultery is the act of having sex with someone you’re not married to and either you’re married, or they’re married, or you’re both married, but not to each other.* I know this is a temptation because you can have the best marriage in the world and still think, “What if…” All of us—no matter male or female, no matter old or young, no matter how godly—could commit adultery.

This is such a serious temptation the father writes not one, or two, but three discourses telling his son how much damage adultery can cause. If you’re not married you shouldn’t ignore these passages because adultery is not that much different *sex-outside of marriage—fornication*. Fornication may not be the exact same thing as adultery but it’s still a step down the same path, the way of the foolish.

When I lived in Colorado you could drive 15-20 minutes from my house and go on a beautiful hike up a valley or into the mountains. At the trailhead, the Park Rangers posted useful information, like a map that showed how to get to the different destinations. If you wanted to hike to the Rabbit Ears Campsite you took this trail and if you wanted to get to the Peregrine Campsite you took that trail. If you want to get to Bridal Veil Falls you followed the trail to the end. Bridal Veil Falls is a beautiful 20-foot waterfall that looks misty white like a wedding veil as it falls down.

At the beginning of our trail our Park Ranger, the father in our illustration, has posted a map. In fact, he starts all three discourses by saying pretty much the same thing, “Pay attention to my commands, God’s Word. Stay on the right path by obeying my words which are the very words of God.” This is not self-righteous or authoritarian. The father is simply passing along the laws of God in his own vocabulary.

Proverbs 7:1-2

- 1 My son, keep my words
and store up my commands within you.
- 2 Keep my commands and you will live;
guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. (NIV)

(See also 5:1-2; 6:20-23; 7:3-5)

If there's one thing I feel like I'm returning to in this sermon series is that we all need to get serious about God's Word. We need to get serious about reading, studying, understanding, and applying the Bible because that's our map for the Christian life. We don't just read the Bible like we might read a classic in literature class. We read the Bible because we want to know the author, God himself, and live according to God's plan.

At the trailheads, the Park Rangers sometimes post serious signs like, "Warning Mountain Lions." When I was a kid a mountain lion killed a hiker outside of the town I grew up in. Those signs made me nervous and a little bit more watchful. Once there was a mountain lion outside of our housing at night, growing from the neighbor's yard. We shinned a light in the back yard, and we could see just its eyes reflecting in the night. Our predator in Proverbs isn't a feline but an adulterer. Proverbs identifies her as the "forbidden woman" or the "adulteress." She is married and she is off limits.

The father warns his son that if he goes after the forbidden woman he will encounter **two temptations**:

A. Words of affirmation (Proverbs 5:3; 6:24; 7:21)

In all three speeches the father warns his son not just about her beauty or dress but her words.

Proverbs 5:3

For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey,
and her speech is smoother than oil; (NIV)

(See also 6:24; 7:21)

Are any of you familiar with the five-love languages? One of the ways people feel loved is when others tell them how wonderful they are ("You're so nice!"). This can be a great encouragement in marriage and a devastating tool outside of it. That doesn't mean we should all stop complimenting each other, but if our spouse isn't affirming us we need to be careful we don't go looking for it in another man or woman.

Maybe some of you ladies feel like this passage is a little-one sided. In your experience it's been smooth-talking men who are the problem. That's true. Proverbs is written with young men as its audience but young women can apply it to their lives just as easily.

Proverbs 7:21

With persuasive words *he* led *her* astray;
he seduced *her* with *his* smooth talk. (*adapted* from NIV)

Women, if you encounter a guy like this run the other way! If he wants to break up your marriage or wants the benefits of marriage without the commitment of marriage, get out of there. Second temptation...

B. Culture of acceptance (Proverbs 7:10-20)

The woman in chapter seven uses her beauty and dress and kisses to seduce the young man (those are part of the temptation) but verse 12 tells us she does it in the "streets" and "market" and "every corner." Part of what can make it so hard to resist the seduction of sexual immorality is that it's everywhere. We see adultery and fornication on television, in the movies, in the news, in elected officials, in schools, in business, and on and on. While our culture doesn't condone adultery, it also doesn't hide it. And even when it happens, we often just want everyone involved "to be happy." These things can grow into a real temptation.

There's something unique about the adulteress. Scripture says she's offered her sacrifices (Proverbs 7:14). She's religious. She's spiritual. And yet she doesn't take God's commands seriously. Her religion is a feel-good faith. Some churches don't want to offend or come across judgmental so don't teach on sexual sin, but

sexual sin is incredibly harmful and we're all susceptible. *The two temptations are words of affirmation and a culture of acceptance.*

But what if you give in? There are **five consequences** of adultery:

1. Fleeting pleasure (Proverbs 5:3-4)

Her lips are like honey but they soon turn bitter. Honey is good. It's sweet. I like honey. But would you want honey you knew would give you botulism? According to the CDC, botulism can lead to "difficulty breathing, muscle paralysis, and even death." No. Sweetness turns bitter. The second consequence...

2. Financial and bodily ruin (Proverbs 5:10-11; 6:30-31)

As Bernie told me, "Marriage is grand. But divorce is a hundred grand." He doesn't take credit for that saying. I thought I might tell a story of how adultery ruined someone financially but you probably can think of your own examples of people you know whose affair has cost them their jobs, or their homes, or their kids, and so they began to drink, or sleep around, and that led to alcoholism or depression.

3. Disgrace (Proverbs 5:9; 6:33)

There's nothing but shame down this path. Fourth consequence...

4. Angry spouse (Proverbs 6:34-35)

An angry husband or an angry wife may exact revenge through divorce, taking the kids, taking your motorcycle, and your golf clubs, and whatever else you loved more than them. When I was in seminary there was a shooting at the local Starbucks. One police officer shot another officer because he thought the man was having an affair with his wife. One of my classmates was at the Starbucks when it happened. The victim didn't die but the shooter took his own life. I don't know if there actually was an affair but just the very perception of adultery can lead to loss of life. And yet these consequences dim in comparison to the final consequence.

5. God's punishment (Proverbs 6:29) / Death (Proverbs 5:5, 23; 6:26; 7:23, 27)

The ultimate consequence of adultery or fornication is God's judgment, which leads to eternal death. You might not have to deal with financial or bodily ruin, or disgrace, or an angry spouse in this life, but anyone who commits these things will have to deal with God's justice if they don't repent.

Our five consequences are fleeting pleasure, financial and bodily ruin, disgrace, an angry spouse, and God's punishment, which is eternal death. That sounds bad. But we have **three rules to stay safe**:

Rule #1 - Stay away. (Proverbs 5:8; 7:7-8)

If you want to stay safe from mountain lions, don't go anywhere near where you think a mountain lion might be. This applies to the forbidden woman or forbidden man too. Take a different path. The tragedy of the story the father tells is that in chapter 5 what does the father say?

Proverbs 5:8

Keep to a path far from her,
do not go near the door of her house, (NIV)

And then what does the father watch a young man do in chapter 7?

Proverbs 7:7-8

7 I saw among the simple,
I noticed among the young men,
a youth who had no sense.
8 He was going down the street near her corner,
walking along in the direction of her house (NIV)

The easiest way to fall off the cliff of temptation is to hike to the edge. Proximity. So often we say to ourselves, “How close can I get to the edge? How far is too far? How emotionally invested can I become in this relationship without actually committing adultery?” Playing with temptation leads to emotional adultery, which leads to physical adultery.

Now I do not think this means that men and women can’t be friends. I am not a proponent of the Billy Graham rule where a man can never be alone with a woman who is not his wife. I think that rule objectifies women and discards the blessing of male-female friendships. There’s a big difference between staying away from the opposite gender and staying away from the temptation of adultery. If you know someone does tempt you or you tempt them, then absolutely set up boundaries, but otherwise use wisdom and discernment and keep your spouse informed. That leads me to rule #2 for staying safe.

Rule #2 - Take a friend. (Proverbs 5:15-20)

There was a man recently who was running and got attacked by a juvenile mountain lion in Colorado. It weighed between 35-40 pounds and could have killed him. But like Chuck Norris, he actually killed it instead. He plans to go running again but next time he’s going to bring a friend. God has given anyone who is married a partner, and Lord-willing a friend, their spouse, to help them fight temptation. And what’s the number one tool God has given married couples to fight sexual temptation? Sex!

Proverbs 5:15-20

15 Drink water from your own cistern,
running water from your own well.

He’s not talking about a literal well here. It’s a poem. It’s a metaphor. Have sex with your spouse.

16 Should your springs overflow in the streets,
your streams of water in the public squares?
17 Let them be yours alone,
never to be shared with strangers.

Treasure the gift of sex in marriage and don’t share it with anyone else.

18 May your fountain be blessed,
and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.
19 A loving doe, a graceful deer—
may her breasts satisfy you always,
may you ever be intoxicated with her love.
20 Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man’s wife?
Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman?

Sometimes as the church we can be a bit squeamish about sex. Talking about it can make us feel uncomfortable. But do you know what the Bible right here is telling husbands and wives to do? To have sex and to savor it! A Christian married couple can have a far better sex-life than anything the world has to offer

because it's built not just on love for each other, but love for God, and on a marriage commitment that God himself created and affirms.

But what about if you're single? How can you fight temptation? Marriage is not always the answer. God can give you Godly-Christian friends to encourage you and help hold you accountable. *Take a friend.*

Now there's a temptation here as Pastor Bryan Chapell says to either feel prideful or condemned. You might walk away prideful because you've never committed adultery, so you're good to go. Or you might walk away condemned because you have committed adultery. Well this is why we need the gospel because I want us all to walk away convicted and forgiven. See, the problem is worse than we thought. Jesus said:

Matthew 5:28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (NIV)

Are you saying that for me to even imagine a "what if..." with that other person, I've already committed adultery? Yes. Being tempted is not sin. But giving into the temptation and accepting it and dwelling on it and thinking about it is lust and lust is sin. Do you know what that means? We're guilty of adultery. Do you know what God says the penalty for adultery is? Death.

Deuteronomy 22:22 If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel. (NIV)

Because of the lust in our hearts it's as if we've committed adultery and every single one of us deserves death and hell. That's why Jesus had to die. That's why Jesus had to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross. The law required a life and we can either pay with our own or let Christ pay for us. Maybe you're thinking that you would never let anyone pay for your sins—that it's better to pay for your own mistakes.

I would agree with you except for one thing. You can't pay. You don't have enough capital. In fact, you don't have any capital. The Bible says "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). That's like you having zero dollars and owing a billion dollars. You'll forever try to repay what you can never pay. That's hell. You need someone who can actually pay, who has enough capital. *This brings me to...*

Rule #3 (what matters most) - Believe in Jesus. (John 3:16)

Jesus has the capital required to pay for your and my adultery of the heart. He never sinned and always obeyed his Father. His whole life he never committed adultery or lusted in his heart. He was alone with women and men and he was just fine. He was perfectly good and holy and used his capital to pay our debt. He took our death penalty on the cross. He died to save us from our sin.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (NIV)

If you want to be forgiven for the adultery in your heart or the adultery you've actually committed *believe in Jesus*. Three days after his crucifixion Jesus rose from the dead so that whoever repents of their sin—admits their wrongdoing—and believes in him will receive complete forgiveness. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). *Believe in Jesus*.

Even if you have committed adultery, we know Jesus loves you and forgives you. What did Jesus do when he encountered the woman caught in adultery? He refused to condemn her, and wouldn't let good religious people condemn her either. Instead, he said, "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:1-11) If you've committed adultery, we don't condemn you. We welcome you. You are forgiven in Jesus. We hope you'll join our community and experience healing.

The path of wisdom is different than what sin offers. There's still dangers and mountain lions lurking nearby. But you've brought a friend, your spouse, and the Park Ranger is showing you the way, Christ Jesus. He promises us if we keep trusting him he'll lead us into joy, to Bridal Veil Falls. *Believe in Jesus. He doesn't condemn you. And neither do we.*

Jonathan Romig preached an earlier edition of this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA on July 27th, 2019 when he served there as pastor. You can download a PDF copy at archive.org or read it online at [Substack](https://substack.com). Jonathan attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) where he earned his Master of Divinity (M.Div) and Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) degrees.

Discussion Questions

Questions for small groups, Bible studies, or personal devotionals:

1. What is the way of the wise and the way of the foolish?
2. How can words of affirmation lead to adultery?
3. How does our culture understand adultery?
4. What are the likely consequences of adultery?
5. What are biblical ways to resist the temptation of adultery?
6. How does Jesus treat those who have committed adultery?
7. Is there any sin so great that God's can't forgive and restore us?

Resource Recommendations

Some of the links in this manuscript are affiliate links (“aff link”), which means we get a small percentage if you purchase the resource through the link. We recommend checking out your local library or thrift store.

[How To Read Proverbs](#) (affiliate link) by Tremper Longman III

[The Book of Proverbs](#) by BibleProject

Free Sermon Notes Worksheet ([PDF](#))

[Two Paths | Proverbs 1:8-33 Sermon](#) by Jonathan Romig ([video](#))

Proverbs Sermon Series

Go through the Proverbs with Jonathan Romig in this sermon series: [Everyday Wisdom](#)

Endnotes

Schwartz, Matthew S. “Man Who Suffocated An Attacking Mountain Lion Describes Fight For His Life.” NPR. Published Feb 15, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/15/695035064/man-who-suffocated-attacking-mountain-lion-tells-his-story> Accessed July 25, 2019.



You can watch this sermon on [YouTube](#).